

PASS ON PAMPHLETS.

No. 15.

Id.

Socialism

for

Commercial

Travellers

NORMAN TIPTAFT

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SOCIALISM FOR COMMERCIAL TRAVELLERS.

By NORMAN TIPTAFT
(*Commercial Travellers' Socialist Society*).

GENTLEMEN,

The name by which you are best known, and of which you are so justly proud, is "Ambassadors of Commerce." You hold in your hands at the present time the key of the industrial world. Without you business would be practically at a standstill. You are, in short, one of the most necessary parts of our present economic system.

Most of you, gentlemen, are fully aware of that fact, and you are never weary of pointing out the glory, greatness, and responsibility of your position and demonstrating how the reputation of your respective firms has been built up by the efforts of their travellers. You are in the main a prosperous body of men, and your outlook on life is largely coloured by the comfortable conditions under which you live. You may say that the road is a hard life, that the constant changing of beds, the waiting outside customers' shops and at railway stations, the exposure to all sorts of weather, are great inconveniences; that competition is making the life much harder than it used to be. All these

things are true, but the fact remains that out of business hours you move through the land as monarchs of all you survey. Hotel keepers hasten to supply your smallest want; railway servants wait upon you as you travel; boots, waiters, out-porters, all help to relieve you of any superfluous labour, and you live on the fat of the land. You will not deny that this is so, and in the bulk you are quite satisfied with your existence. This satisfaction makes you view with a certain amount of suspicion any suggestion of change in your method of life or in the industrial conditions which make it. You are, in short, a rank Conservative. You may not all be so in politics (although you mostly are in that), but with your conception of the country's commercial methods you are incapable of perceiving the vast changes by which you are faced. This is largely accounted for by your being too engrossed in your business to have any spare time for reading history, and thus finding out how you, as a class, came into existence. You know you did not always exist. There was a time much more recent than you think when business was conducted almost entirely without commercial travellers. This may be upsetting to your ideas as to your indispensability, but it is none the less true; and I want to show you, if you will have patience to listen, that not only were you once non-existent, but that certain circumstances which you are powerless to control are again making for your extinction; that you are actually not essential to the conduct of business; that you are really so much waste labour, and that in a better-organised business system you will disappear. Further, gentlemen, I shall endeavour to convince you that such a change is eminently desirable, not only on your own behalf, but on behalf of the commerce of the country, and that the value of your brains might be more profitably used than in the endeavour to upset rival houses and grab their trade. Such changes are implied in the economic scheme called Socialism. You do not—in the bulk—understand what Socialism is. Your information about it is derived solely from the papers whose

interest it is to misrepresent it, and the totality of your knowledge is summed up in a hazy idea (which is also accompanied by a vague fear) that under Socialism you would be reduced to the level of the ordinary labourer, that any savings you might have invested would be taken away from you to keep the wastrels, and that the whole thing is a gigantic swindle to destroy all healthy competition, and substitute the all-powerful domination of the State and the State official. This *is* your idea, gentlemen, because you have told me so, not in one, but in dozens, of commercial rooms where the subject has been discussed, and it is simply and altogether false. What Socialism is and how it would affect you as a class you will perhaps understand a little better when you understand what your present position is, how it came to be, and where it will end.

There have been a few commercial travellers in England under one guise or another from the time when the Phœnicians traded with the Ancient Britons; but they were merely isolated individuals until some ninety years ago. At that time transit received an enormous impetus owing to the introduction of steam, and it was through that development the commercial traveller in any quantity became a possibility. Previously, owing to the difficulty of conveying manufactures from one place to another, each locality had produced all its own necessities, the only things imported being articles of luxury.

The development of transit brought distant centres relatively much nearer to each other, and was immediately responsible for the opening of new markets. In conjunction with the development of our transit capacities there had been a corresponding development in our methods of production. The older style of manual labour and individual ownership had given way to machines and capitalistic companies. The development of the weaving trade will serve as an example. A hundred and fifty years ago all the weaving in Lancashire was done by individual weavers in their own homes. The

father provided his own warp of linen yarns and his cotton wool for weft. He purchased the yarn in a prepared state, while the wool for the weft was carded and spun by his wife and daughters, and the cloth woven by himself and his sons. There was a division of labour, but the producers themselves owned all the means of production. There were neither capitalistic companies nor hands working for wages. The weaver was himself his own producer and distributor. But about 1760 the Manchester dealers commenced the practice, instead of buying cloths ready made from the weaver, of providing him with the material and paying him a fixed sum for the work done. So the Manchester dealer became an employer of labour, and the transformation of the independent weaver into a wage-receiver began. In 1769 Arkwright patented the spinning frame; a few years later Crompton, Pollard, and others made further improvements in the machinery of production, until by the early part of the last century the whole method of individual weaving had given way to capitalists on the one hand, owning costly machinery, and workers on the other, employed by the capitalists to produce the goods.

What happened to weaving applied to every other trade. Machinery was introduced at first in simple and comparatively inexpensive form; it became more complex and costly, rapidly dispensing with manual labour, until the small hand producer was ousted by the large machine-using company, becoming at last a wage-earner in its employ. This new arrangement enormously increased the productive capacity of the country. An increased production meant the opening up of new markets; transit had become comparatively easy, the only remaining requisite was the man to open the new markets, and he was promptly forthcoming in the person of the commercial traveller.

This, gentlemen, is how you originated. Had there been no advance in machinery for production and transport, you as a body would be non-existent to-day. You are solely the product—and not the

cause, as some of you think—of the present industrial system. That system is comprised of two classes—capitalists on the one hand, who own the productive machinery, and workers on the other in their employ; and you cannot fail to be aware that it is the business of each party to get as much out of the other as it can, the only difference being that the capitalists, having the means of production under their control, can always dictate to the workers, who have nothing. That policy they have successfully pursued, until at the present time the wages of the employees—once themselves independent traders—are barely more than enough to feed and clothe them. In other words, wages for workers are at the level of a bare subsistence. This, gentlemen, has been the result of modern capitalism on those workers who have contributed most to make it the power it is. *The capitalist class has invariably fought to reduce the wages of its workers to the lowest possible level.*

I put that sentence in italics, gentlemen, because I want you to see your own position clearly. You are employees, workers, "hands"—nothing more. You may wear top-hats and frock-coats, you may consider the working man as beneath your notice; it does not matter—you are *employees*, out of whom the capitalist proposes to make all the money he can. There is no sentiment in modern business: that is all you stand for in relationship to capital—so much labour, necessary under present conditions, producing for your masters so much results in the shape of dividends, and immediately you cease to produce these results you will be thrown on the scrap heap in exactly the same way as any other old machine. Of course, to a certain extent you understand that: you know when a man is too old or incompetent to do his work that he is "scrapped": it is part of the system; but the idea, though continued familiarly, has ceased to impress you much; you have, in fact, a kind of admiration for it—it rewards ability, you say. But have you ever thought it possible that the whole of your profession may be

scrapped, *will* be scrapped, is being scrapped to-day wherever it can be?

The reason is that, however hard you work, your labours do not add one single farthing to the actual usable value of the articles you sell. Black-lead brushes will wear quite as long if they are supplied direct by the firm as if you take the order yourself. The cleansing powers of Blank's soap are just as great if Blank's customers post their orders direct as if they give them you. You are non-producers, and as soon as non-producing labour can be dispensed with it has to go. Do you follow that, gentlemen? If your employers can devise a method whereby they can do without paying your wages they will do it—because they are there to make money and not to study your feelings; and already methods are abroad whereby the commercial traveller will be as surely displaced as was the independent weaver a century ago. You observed the transition from individual effort in separate establishments to collective effort in larger establishments, and the enormous increase of production caused thereby. That is proof conclusive of the superiority of combination. The small trader is powerless against the wealthy corporation, and so in time becomes extinct. When he has become extinct, and the business passes into the hands of a few large firms, there is formed a trust. *And the formation of trusts means the immediate dismissal of commercial travellers.*

America is a case in point. The formation of the American trusts has, it is estimated by a New York paper, been responsible for the dismissal of over seventy thousand travellers. Seventy thousand men scrapped without the slightest hesitation when it is found their labour can be dispensed with. Again, let me repeat it: Capital is out for dividends, and not to study your feelings. And every combination of capital means so much less employment for you. Well, gentlemen, what do you propose to do about it? You cannot stop these combinations of capital. You cannot, in common fairness, argue against them, since the result is to benefit the community at large

(and the capitalists in particular) by decreasing the cost of production; and yet under them you will as surely become extinct as the dodo.

There are only two alternatives—either you must struggle on as best you can, becoming less numerous and less serviceable, but obstinately clinging to the system as the best possible one that can be devised in this best of possible worlds, or you must boldly renounce it and advocate another. Either you must be done away with by monopoly under the trusts, with the large capitalists as universal providers—and you know how much you may expect from them—or you must be done away with by monopoly under the State, which is Socialism. There is no other course open.

The small provider, the individual firm, is out of date, expensive, inefficient—and he must go. Production, distribution, and exchange can be done more efficiently and less expensively by the larger combination. It *must* come to it. Is the larger combination to be the private capitalist working for his own individual ends—the getting of all the profits he can for himself—or the State using the means of production, distribution, and exchange for the benefit of the whole community? If you are displaced by the capitalist and the trust, you may do what you can; they will do nothing for you; it makes no difference to them whether you work or starve. But if you are displaced by the State, it is to the interest of the State as a whole that you should be found immediate work to do, since if you are not working you become a charge on the community at large. That is one aspect of the unemployed problem, gentlemen, that you insist on forgetting. Every man who is unemployed lives on the labour of somebody else—is bound to, since he is not producing anything which entitles him to a wage. Which means, at the present time, the whole of the people are living on what part of the people produce. And yet you object to work being found for the unemployed because it is unprofitable. Do you not see that, be it ever so unprofitable, it is yet better than nothing at all, since even the slightest

production on their part means that they are adding something to the national income instead of nothing? It is conducive to the welfare of the State that the whole of the people work, and you cannot have that condition until you have Socialism, for unemployment is a necessary corollary of the present system.

This, then, gentlemen, is a short account of your origin, your present economic position, and the future which inevitably awaits you. As business men you will hardly cling to a system which will at the earliest possible opportunity divest itself of your labours and leave you stranded on the industrial scrap heap. Your only hope of obtaining security of livelihood is through Socialism. Under Socialism you will be found work. You immediately say: Yes, but what kind of work? Am I, who have been used to every comfort, who have all my life mixed with decent society, who have been considered rather an important individual—am I to be put to sweeping streets or labouring on farms or pushing a barrow or—horrible thought!—be a porter on the very railways on which I used to travel? In short, it is the old question, Who will do the dirty work? And it is a nightmare to a lot of people who ought to know better. Do you not see this, gentlemen, while there is a certain amount of dirty work to be done to-day, and while, I suppose, there will (for some time, at all events) be *some*, that work is only done by men who cannot get anything better?

To-day a lot of men are offered the choice, Do this or starve; and because they cannot do—are not capable, in many cases, of doing—better, they do what we term the dirty work. As to who does it, it does not at present concern anybody in particular, providing that it is *done*. Under Socialism it would very much concern somebody: it would concern the whole State. If, for instance, a man was capable of directing a railway, it would be a big loss to the community that he should be employed to empty ash-bins. For a man who could paint beautiful pictures, or write inspiring books, or organise large industries, to be compelled to do *less*

would be a loss to the community. - Yet under the *present* system men who are capable of doing the highest things are forced by the necessity of their daily bread to do the most menial. I know to-day an out-porter—one who has probably pushed a barrow for many of you who read this—who has translated the greater part of the Bible into verse, and is, besides, the author of several poems—all unprinted. I do not say the man is a Shakespeare, but he has never had the chance to be: he is uneducated, and he has to think out his poetry while he waits patiently outside a shop in any weather at your beck and call. - If he had had a chance he might have done something better for the community than push a barrow.

You can take the history of the large majority of the world's great men, and you will find they had to do common, menial work whereby to live, and use only their spare time for the greater things whereby they benefited the world. Burns was an Excise man—had to be to get a living. Ben Jonson was a bricklayer. Arkwright was a barber. There are thousands of them. The dirty work to-day is often done by men who might be far more usefully employed doing something else. Under Socialism there would be less of it, for machinery would be employed wherever possible; it would be rewarded with less hours and better pay, and finally, and *most important*, it would be done by those who had not ability or desire to serve the State in any more useful way.

Now, gentlemen, do you think your own capacities could be better employed under the Socialist State than in doing dirty work? What abilities have you got, what expert knowledge do you possess? Let us see. In the first place you have a good acquaintance with the class of goods demanded in your particular line on the ground you work. What has a good sale, for instance, in Lancashire may be hopelessly out of it in an agricultural county; you can tell exactly whether it will sell or not. Secondly, you have acquired a most useful experience in your continued travelling as to the best methods of transit;

you know just exactly the minor details which make all the difference between travel in comfort and travel in discomfort. Then you have a first-hand knowledge of the requirements of a modern hotel, which is far more than most hotel proprietors have. You have also been compelled by your profession to map out the week's work accurately and with fore-thought in order to use your time to its fullest capacity. You have, too, acquired the faculty of reading a man's character largely by the way he places his orders. In short, the continued moving from place to place and meeting with such widely-divergent types has given you an all-roundness and general knowledge which the ordinary man lacks.

Could the Socialist State employ those abilities better than by putting you to "do dirty work"? You can hardly doubt it. For instance, under Socialism, distribution of products will become a fine art. Who better capable of directing it than the men who are familiar with the needs of each locality? Who more useful as inspectors of that distribution than the men who the moment they walk into a shop can tell whether the proprietor is using the most modern business methods or not? These things are mere suggestions; you can work out others for yourselves. I have, I hope, made it quite clear that not only will Socialism find you work under better conditions than those you now have, but it will be anxious to use your abilities in the work for which you are best fitted. So that from a purely selfish and individual standpoint you have everything to gain and nothing to lose.

You may ask, "But *who* is to be judge of what I am best fitted for, and how am I to obtain this higher position?" Of course, in all matters of detail it must be understood that no Socialist can give an absolutely certain statement as to what will happen when Socialism is the guiding principle of the State, any more than a Conservative can give the exact details of a Conservative Budget twenty years ahead (supposing there be a Conservative Party by that time). But it is as certain as one can be certain of the future that all higher positions (for Socialism em-

phatically does *not* aim at a dead level) will be secured by competition, and the competition will be considerably keener than it is now. "What!" you say. "Competition under Socialism?" Yes, gentlemen, and plenty of it. Those of us who are well and strong will, under Socialism, get what we are worth to the community—no more, no less—but we shall get *all* we are worth. And you can quite see that with the general level of intelligence raised by better education the men who occupy the higher positions are not likely to be duffers. And the fact that *only* men who are fitted for the higher posts by expert knowledge and capabilities will get them will hardly detract from the good organisation of the whole community.

Do you not think your capacity for getting orders when trade is rotten, competition keen, and buyers bad-tempered will make you pretty useful citizens of the Socialist State? But apart from its appeal to you as a means of ensuring your individual maintenance in a fairly comfortable manner, Socialism has, to my mind, one stronger still. This question of your personal well-being is, of course, vitally important: you cannot take a great interest in the welfare of your country's people or your country's commerce if all your energies are necessarily devoted to getting your own living; but that secure, you can turn your thoughts to matters—public matters—which urgently need your attention.

One of the worst features of the present system is sweated labour. Socialism would abolish it. Another deplorable thing is shoddy. Socialism would abolish that. Another is unemployment. Socialism would abolish that. It would, in short, produce finer work, at less cost, under better conditions. You naturally ask for practical methods. It would abolish sweated labour by the establishment of a minimum wage. And that minimum wage, whatever it might be fixed at, would be enough to supply the workers—*all the workers*—with the necessities of life. There is nothing in that proposition to discourage ability. No man would be forced to accept that minimum if he could make himself worth more,

and the opportunity to do so would be always there. A minimum wage would not mean an increase in the cost of production, for it would be more than counter-balanced by the economies exercised in the abolition of unnecessary labour and competition. The increased spending capacity of the people would result in such a boom of trade as we have never experienced. Just picture everyone in the country with enough money to spend! Bad trade would be an impossibility. Increased spending capacity of the workers means always increased trade for everybody. The thing works automatically. Low wages, bad trade; high wages, good trade. With better trade shoddy is bound to go. There has never been a genuine need of it. It is merely the product of the system which compels the workers to buy the cheapest because they have not money for the better, and with a comfortable standard of living and better education its doom is sealed.

You may, gentlemen, ask, quite naturally, the effect of all this displaced labour on the unemployed market. Would it not tend to make it worse? On the contrary, the larger demand would quickly absorb extra workers. The land would be at last cultivated as it ought to be, and the extra demand there would account for any surplus labour. It has, of course, to be borne in mind that the hours of work would be shortened, in order to give people at least an opportunity to lead something like the life God intended them to do. Under conditions like these the national life could not but be reflected in the national production. The workman would commence to reflect his altered conditions in the very work he produced. That is not a polite fiction, or the dream of an idealist. Look at the beauty of the country and the ugliness of the town. The fact is our environment makes us what we are. There is nothing so horribly monotonous as life in a Lancashire cotton mill. And there is nothing so damnably ugly as a typical Lancashire cotton town. The grinding conditions under which the people work and live reproduce themselves in their buildings. The present system is ugly, and it produces

ugliness. Anything else is produced in spite of the system and not because of it; and a more reasonable life, less toil, no poverty, would reflect itself in better work. An appeal to history will convince you. If you will examine the handicraft of a few centuries ago (before we were blessed by our present methods), you cannot fail to observe its superiority to that of to-day. Men had more leisure, were not so hardly driven, and they worked well.

These things, then—the abolition of sweated labour, of shoddy, of unemployment—inevitable necessities of the present system—form a not inconsiderable appeal to every man to try and shape a better, to advocate the only way that even offers a solution—Socialism. I have in the preceding pages endeavoured to show something of the need you have of Socialism, both as a means of ensuring your own happiness and prosperity and that of the world at large. You may say, gentlemen, that I have not made the case as clear as it might be, that I have not worked out the conclusions in all their detail as you could have wished. To both charges I plead guilty. It is that fact which enables me to make another appeal. You quite see that something is wrong, that it cannot be right for twelve millions of your fellow-countrymen to be always on the verge of starvation, for half the children born to the working classes to die before they reach the age of five, for the bulk of our population to be housed in slums and tenements, five, six, even ten, in a single room. There must, surely, on an earth competent to provide an abundance for all men, be a way out of conditions like these! And yet the difficulties of making the change are great. You need Socialism; but Socialism needs you. You have business capacity, you are in constant touch with the problems of supply and demand, you come to the case as experts. Work for commercial travellers? No, gentlemen, you are *not* required to do the dirty work. You are wanted to apply your brains in the interests of the community to the forwarding and establishing a condition of things in which every man shall be free to work, every woman

free to fulfil her natural duties, every child free to play. There is no dirty work in a task like that.

It is with that object in view that some few of us on the road have formed a Commercial Travellers' Socialist Society. The first meeting was held in Birmingham in November of last year (1908). The initial attendance was something less than a score. To-day (April, 1909) we have members as far south as Brighton, as far north as Aberdeen. Over ten thousand pamphlets embodying the main outlines of Socialism have been distributed to commercials in the United Kingdom. Sets of Socialist books have been placed in several hotels, and correspondence has been conducted in London and provincial papers. The object of the Society is the spreading of Socialism among commercial travellers, and its methods: (a) the provision of Socialist books and literature for use in hotel commercial rooms throughout the United Kingdom; (b) facilities for interchange of information among members; (c) organisation for the conduct of Press correspondence, and for presentation of Socialist principles in debating and other societies; (d) social fellowship. The books provided so far are: *Britain for the British* and *Merrie England*, by Robert Blatchford; *Common Objections to Socialism Answered*, by R. B. Suthers; *Looking Backward*, by Bellamy; *The Citizen of To-morrow*, edited by the Wesleyan Union of Social Service; *Riches and Poverty*, by Chiozza Money; *Social Problems*, by Henry George; *New Worlds for Old*, by H. G. Wells; and *Fabian Essays* (new edition). These bookcases are presented to the hotels entirely free of charge, the only stipulation being that the proprietor, to the best of his ability, shall protect them from misuse. The entire cost of postage and incidental expenses has been borne so far by the members at headquarters, and the whole of the country subscriptions devoted to propaganda work. The secretary is C. H. Foyle, Stonehenge, Cambridge Road, King's Heath, Birmingham, from whom any further information may be obtained. The literature secretary, P. H. Durant, 289, Stratford Road,

Birmingham, will forward, on receipt of the cash discount price, any book in the case post free. The minimum subscription is 5s. per annum, and the Society is open to all commercial travellers who are in sympathy with the Socialist movement. There have been casual objectors belonging to the movement who have deprecated the formation of a new society, pointing out that there is already in existence a large number of Socialist Associations, and that further division only causes needless expense, and at the same time diminishes the efficiency of the larger bodies. It was, however, felt by the promoters that the C.T.S.S. was likely to influence men who would not come within the reach of any ordinary Socialist society, and who possibly might not be ready to accord to them the same hearing that they might to men who occupy the same positions as they do themselves. We who are members of the C.T.S.S. can at all events, gentlemen, address you on a level footing. We are in the same boat, and we have not reached our present conclusions without certain thought and consideration.

It has been customary among you to sneer at Socialism as at best an impossible dream, at the worst a condition of State slavery crushing out all individuality and reducing men to the level of the ordinary labourer. And you have spoken and thought of Socialists as a set of won't-works, wasters, fanatics with red ties, coupled with a few harmless dreamers, one or two idiotic parsons, and a crowd of vulgar Atheists. Really, you have refused to listen to Socialism because you thought it unworthy of your consideration. I saw one of your daily papers came out the other day with the statement that Socialism only numbered among its richer adherents journalists, authors, and professors; that the practical man of business, the man who was really capable of organising the Socialistic State (if it were possible to organise it at all) did not join the movement because he saw through its absurdities. Well, gentlemen, we are a society formed exclusively of hard-headed, practical, business men. We believe in Socialism because it seems to accord

with common sense. We think the present method of providing for our population is idiotic, and we are convinced that the economics of Socialism are sound and practical. In short, it appeals to us as a real first-class business deal. We are sure the whole of the nation would be better off under it, and we advocate it by every means in our power as the only solution of the gigantic evils which make our present industrial system an inhuman warfare instead of a peaceful co-operation. You as business men (apart from any other qualifications, such as kindness, charity, goodwill which you may possess) cannot but deplore the unsatisfactoriness of the present system. It has got beyond the discussion stage; it is admitted by men of all political opinions and in every walk of life that things are rotten. Both the older political Parties confess their inability to radically alter them. We of the Socialist Party say that we have a plan which will do so. If we have, it is of vital interest to you that that plan should be brought into immediate operation. You cannot say it is absurd, unreasonable, impossible if you do not know what it is. We therefore ask you not to dismiss it with a contemptuous shrug of the shoulders until you really know something about it. A very bare outline is attempted in this paper; further facts and arguments may be obtained from the books mentioned. If, after studying the Socialist case from Socialist literature (and surely, as business men, it is worth your study!), you still remain unconvinced, you will at least be able to defend your position with an actual knowledge of the facts. If, on the other hand, Socialism appeals to you as a workable idea, as the only workable idea, you will join us in the endeavour to make life happier, freer, and fuller for the whole of the community.

Above all, whatever you think—you who are particularly orthodox—remember that as you pray that prayer, “Give us this day our daily bread,” twelve millions of your fellow-creatures live perpetually on the verge of starvation.

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"Merrie England" first appeared as a series of articles in the CLARION in 1892-3. These articles, with some revisions and additions, were afterwards produced in volume form at a shilling. The book met with immediate success, some 25,000 copies being sold.

In October, 1894, the CLARION published the same book, uniform in size and type with the shilling edition, at the low price of ONE PENNY. As the book contained 200 pages, and was printed by trade-union labour, and on British-made paper, it could only be produced at a loss. This loss was borne by the proprietors of the CLARION.

The sale of the penny edition outran all expectations. No one supposed that more than 100,000 would be called for, but in a few months over 700,000 had been sold, without a penny being spent in advertisement, and in face of the tremendous opposition excited by Socialistic publications in those days.

Later on an edition was published at 3d., and the total sale reached nearly a million copies.

An American edition is said to have sold equally well, and the book was translated into Welsh, Dutch, German, Scandinavian, Spanish, and other languages, on none of which editions, it may be remarked, did the author receive any royalties.

The British edition has been out of print for some years, and there has recently been a growing demand for the book's re-issue. To this the author at length reluctantly acceded, and the present edition was announced. That the demand was real may be judged from the fact that orders for 20,000 copies were placed before the date of publication, and the new issue promises to sell as well as the first threepenny edition.

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